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**Remarks by Ambassador Michael A. McCarthy during the Photo Donation Ceremony at the National Museum of Liberia**

*As prepared*

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Minister of Information, Hon. Ledgerhood Rennie, Assistant Minister Madam Margret Cooper-Frank, Acting Director of the National Museum Kollie Kennedy, Deputy Minister for Technical Services Boakai Fofana, Assistant Minister for Administration Jurah Sanoe, honored visitors from Firestone Liberia, General Manager Don Darden and Richard Falla. All protocols observed.

It is an honor for me to be here today at the National Museum of Liberia to present these photographs taken by photographer Charles Allmon. These photos were taken when Charles Allmon worked at the Firestone Natural Rubber Company's Harbel facility from 1943 through 1946 as the American supervisor of a large Liberian rubber-tapping crew.

The Liberian Government, Firestone, and the United States Armed Forces collaborated during the 1940s to improve aspects of Liberia's infrastructure to increase rubber production from Liberia, support Allied forces during World War II, and attract outside investments in mining and forestry. This effort was consistent with President Tubman's Open-Door Policy, Firestone's business interests, and American strategic concerns in filling demand for rubber necessitated by the war.

Like the Smithsonian museums in Washington, D.C., Liberia's national museum has many important stories to tell.

National museums are places of memory and inspiration. They preserve and protect precious works of art and culture, as well as everyday objects that record who we are and where we came from.

They help their visitors understand their past, both its triumphs, and its tragedies. And they can spark important conversations about the future.

Both the United States and Liberia have rich pasts, including diverse communities, cultures, and traditions, many of which reach back thousands of years before the founding of our modern nations.

This year Liberia commemorates 200 years since the arrival of free Black Americans on its shores. Our unique relationship has been shaped by ties that span two centuries. It is a relationship based on shared values, and a shared history. Our partnership is strong and continues to this day.

One aspect of our partnership is the opportunity to share knowledge through international exchanges. At the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in the Department of State, we are best known for our

international exchange programs, such as the Fulbright Program and the International Visitor Leadership Program.

Importantly, this donation would not have been possible without the help of Dr. John C. Yoder, a political scientist and historian at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington. Dr. Yoder, in 2019, taught and lectured at Cuttington University's Joseph S. Gaunnu Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution in Liberia as a Fulbright Specialist – a scholar exchange program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. It was Dr. Yoder who met Charles Allmon and received his photographic collection in 2010. The original photographs are housed at the University of Indiana as part of its extensive collection of Liberian materials.

I also want to recognize the Director of this Museum, Mr. Albert Saye Markeh [MAHR-kay], who participated in a 2014 International Visitor Leadership Program in the United States on museum management. I understand that Mr. Markeh has worked for the museum in a variety of capacities since 1991 and was an integral part of the efforts to renovate and reopen this institution in 2017.

As you can see, these important exchange programs continue to pay dividends.

Of course, in the unique relationship between the United States and Liberia, the histories of our nations are inextricably bound to one another. Today we honor that special bond through these photographs.

I am pleased to present these photographs to the museum. These photographs document some of Liberia's history in Harbel and around Monrovia during, and immediately after, World War II.

During the 1930s and 40s, rainforest near Harbel was cleared to make space for new rubber groves. Simultaneously, the Firestone Harbel facility was developed as an industrial enclave to support Firestone's extensive rubber extraction and production operations. Buildings and outdoor spaces provided housing, health care, banking, shopping, recreation, education, and childcare, as well as infrastructure and utilities for the 185 mostly American staff living at Harbel.

We hope these photographs will enhance the collections of this wonderful museum and be a historical attraction for visitors.

I want to underscore that national museums, such as this one, can be strong draws for domestic and international tourists. They are natural centerpieces of a country's tourism strategy because they are uniquely capable of introducing people to the history and culture of a place they have never visited or perhaps have simply taken for granted.

I commend the National Museum of Liberia for all that you have done to preserve and share Liberia with visitors to this country and for future generations of Liberians.

Looking forward, the United States hopes to continue supporting Liberian efforts to preserve your national history and culture, working in partnership with the government and other stakeholders. The Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Presentation, a merit-based grant competition administered by the State Department, is our primary vehicle for such activity. We currently have a project focused on preserving and protecting Providence Island.

Through the Ambassador's Fund, the United States helps to preserve cultural heritage around the world and shows our respect for other cultures.

These grants, joined with national efforts, can provide seed funding for strategic planning, preservation and archiving expertise, as well as restoration capacity.

Ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate the opportunity to be here to present these photographs to you. We are very proud of the special relationship between our countries, and we are glad to help preserve the history of that relationship here today.

Thank you.

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